

MATINEES AT THE GALLERIES

SATURDAY AFTERNOON BRINGS CROWDS TO THE PICTURES.

Artist and Amateur Meet Then on Common Ground—Some Varying Views of Matisse—The Lovers of Miniatures—French Portrait Painters Who Fall.

Saturday afternoon in New York has come to be a regular visiting time among the picture galleries, especially those on Fifth avenue and the streets near by. The picture dealers themselves speak of it as "matinee day" and a look about will assure you that there are just as distinctive types at these places as there are at the playhouses. Perhaps a thousand persons will stroll into some one of the galleries when an especially interesting exhibition is on and from five to six hundred is not by any means an unusual number.

These galleries begin at about Thirty-fourth street and for the next twenty blocks or so you cannot miss the invitation, in the form of an alluring watercolor, oil or pastel cunningly framed in the window with careful attention to lighting and effect.

It is no mean accomplishment, one of the dealers says, to find a picture that will stand this test of catching and holding the eye. Just as the names of popular theatres are household words to thou-



THE WHISPERING GALLERY.

sands of Manhattanites so in other homes the programmes advertised are kept close track of for Knodler's, Durand-Ruel, Schaus's, Macbeth's, Scott & Fowles, the Madison, Montross and others.

Many of the clubs compete with the galleries for the attendance of the Saturday matinee crowd. Several times in the winter the Union League Club sends out cards to feminine friends for some specially noteworthy exhibition, and the National Arts Club, on Gramercy Park, a detour from beaten ground, is rarely without an interesting display.

Numerous as the galleries are and spacious as they seem to be, nevertheless it is one of the oft heard complaints that it is difficult for the unknown artist to get a chance. Contrary to this several of the dealers assert that no artist is turned away without a hearing and that they are anxious and ready to give new talent of the undiscovered, gem in the matrix kind its opportunity.

Another fact you learn with surprise is that every year the attendance of the picture buying class gets steadily larger. Names of the Who's Who order roll glibly from the tongue of one of the dealers who says that if a certain rival of his exhibits many more of the French portraitists' work the future of several of the American artists will be permanently assured.

Asked to explain this more or less enigmatic statement, he says: "There is just as much in the atmosphere that surrounds a picture as there is in that of the picture itself, and many orders are given to French artists and many pictures purchased in their studios which never would cross the seas if it were not for the hypnotic influence of the far away. But when you get a display of French portraits and exhibit them in the cold, clear light of Fifth

American and foreign canvases, and as they were not separated on the walls there was good opportunity for comparison."

Another dealer whose exhibitions are noted for their conservatism says of the new French school of which Matisse is the founder: "There has probably always been a 'new art' as there is to-day. Matisse is only following in the steps of the painters who have gone before him, struggled and died unknown, and unremembered except for a little spurious excitement. All those who painted in the past under the spur of discontent at sound methods and with nothing else have long since been forgotten. The pictures that have lived through the centuries are strangely akin in their fundamentals regardless of the time or country of their production. All great art is indisputably simple and sane."

That the art criticism heard at these Saturday matinees is of a popular rather than of a technical character is proved by the statement, following that of the dealer, made by a fashionably gowned woman who emphasizes her remarks with a lorgnette:

"Matisse!" she scoffs. "There is one dealer in Paris near the Madeleine who shows his canvases to the elect, bringing them out from underneath shelves and from receptacles, considering them too sacred for the multitude to view. I had a card of introduction and the advice to 'be discreet,' as there was much feeling in the air circles. I consider I was diplomatic in the extreme under the provocation I received. When I was asked how I liked the canvases which seemed to me to have been painted by one of the sidewalk artists who had gone suddenly mad I merely remarked that 'I thought they were the most fright-

ful atrocities I had ever seen masquerading in the name of art.' The dealer smiled pensively, merely said he had thought so himself at first, but now could not live without one at his elbow. It was to him the intoxication that another might get from a glass of champagne."

"And just as spurious," I remarked. "Matisse!" remarks a long haired painter. "His art is like the music of Elektra" put on canvas. New York is frightfully provincial, else we would have already had an exhibition of his work; but it's coming, and I predict the greatest sensation that we have ever had. Remember there was just as much hue and cry raised when Monet and Manet first exhibited, and what sort of reception did Rodin get when he dared break away from the barbed wire edges of convention?"

"Matisse," remarks a third who has waited to add his quota of information. "Yes, they call him the Strauss of the palette. I don't believe the man is sincere. A few years ago he was painting pretty little pictures and trying to sell them. They had the right spirit in them and they were genuine and true and all that, but the dealers had no use for them, and he was starving. Suddenly the name of Matisse was on every tongue. He had shown some canvases that made the pictures of the so-called impressionists look like Sunday school chromes. Many of his landscapes seem as if he had transferred the contents of his palette without alteration to the canvas and his admirers look at these little patches of color and say, 'Art isn't form. It isn't organization.'"

"Once Matisse had to go to a hospital, and for a long time refused to tell his name, for he said 'they would laugh at me.' All Paris was laughing then. To-day Matisse is rich with his country home, his Paris studio and dealers clamoring. New York will have its chance soon to decide whether to laugh or weep."

At the Chase Retropective Exhibition, consisting of about 100 pictures, shown at the National Arts Club, several hundred persons straggled about on a certain Saturday afternoon. Among them were many of the Chase students, graduates and postgraduates. Several summer residents of Shinnecock hovered about the beach and sky views and one of them remarked:

"What I like about the Chase landscapes and watercolors is that he makes the sea and sky so important, and the figures so unimportant. That is the way you feel in an open place like that. Most painters make the two subservient, which they never are. When you stand in front of the ocean you feel as unimportant as a fly—but does an artist give you that impression? Not ordinarily."

Before the portrait of Whistler stand two well known artists. They look intently at the tall, slight figure in its ill fitting coat, the shock of hair, the mysterious eyes and the stick that seems like the wand of a magician.

"It is almost a caricature," murmurs one of them.

"So was he," answers the other.

Another couple stop while a flood

light that falls on barren walls and meagre furnishings seems poverty stricken. Every line of the bent figure shows loneliness and the 'old resignation' with which too often the last years are met. In the heavily marked face is read the hopeless struggle and the hard work and the disappointments of a lost youth.

Before it stands a slim girl holding a well marked catalogue. The fingers peer through the holes in her glove. She fails in every line of her face and body, the ambition without the talent to further its will.

Two prosperous young girl students look at her and murmur in the jargon of the school "ash cat," and turn their attention to the sullen splendor of "The Sisters," while the ash cat turns away hopelessly.

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of Whistler stories are exchanged. "The tragedy of Whistler's life was," you hear, "that he was forever bored by the fear of being bored."

"Like a woman I know," comes from another, "who made herself unhappy all her life because she was so happy that she was afraid."

A middle aged couple are examining a couple of canvases on the wall. You glean that they are seaside neighbors and have watched the growth and development of the Chase summer school with the interest that belongs to the old inhabitant. It may be that they have come to town for this special view.

"Ain't it lifelike?" says the husband, gazing at the silvery fish on the platter, one of the famous Chase still life studies.

"Yes," says wife, gazing at "The Portrait of a Young Girl," "The Portrait of a Young Girl."

"Seen one just like it on the Shinnecock beach last August."

"So did I."

"Eyes are great."

"Look right at you."

"Had on a scarlet bathing suit—wasn't long enough to trip on."

"Oh, you was talking about the fish. I meant the gal."

At the Knodler Gallery Francois Flameng's pretty confessions of pink and blue and white ladies are still attracting. The matinee types are of the fashionable class, and there are many women discussing the merits of portrait painters with a view to future sittings. Half a dozen artists strike critical attitudes.

"Flameng's best work was his decorations for the Barbours," says one, "and his pictures of the Napoleonic era."

"He doesn't deal with the suffragette type."

"His children are perfect, you can't idealize them too much, but his women are bonbon beauties. I might have him paint my daughter, but never my wife. Boldini, Chartran, Flameng and the others, they haven't one of them depicted the soul, the character of the American woman. They can't, for they don't stay long enough to get acquainted with it—they are artists of the surface. They seem to have mixed their colors with soap suds—and they've painted bubble beauties."

In the miniature gallery you find a great number of elderly people and their interest seems of the old fashioned daguerrotype kind. One, who has followed the course of art in this direction for many years, comments on its increasing and amazing growth:

"I attribute it all to the fact that we are a generation of movers. A collection of oil paintings is all very well for a home which remains, but how many of them do you find in America? Miniatures you can take about with ease whenever you change your abode."

A man and woman meet in the centre of the gallery and rhapsodize over some special miniatures.

"Did you ever see my wife's work? No? She hasn't exhibited for quite a while now. She has a fine sense of color—and four children. When they grow up and need less attention—"

The woman laughs. "That is the rock on which we all split. They never grow up so they need less attention. They need more and more, and the first you know she's a grandmother. She'll have to paint in spare minutes. The wage earn-

ing wife is making good under strenuous conditions these days. I paint because I must—and need the money."

At the exhibition of paintings by George Elmer Brown, showing views on the canal at Bruges, a landscape near Cloggia, a Toledo castle, Brittany harbor in moonlight, &c., you hear this spoken by a man who has the mark of barnstorming days:

"You know, old chap, there are certain parts in the profession they call 'actor proof' parts; they're so good that the merest tyro can't spoil them. I always think when I see bits of Venice and those dear old canals, and castles in Spain that act like 'em, the only profession that has actor proof parts. Did you ever see a view of the Grand Canal that didn't make you hold your breath? I never have."

A noticeable characteristic of this gallery is the flirtations in quiet corners. Perish the thought that these places are chosen an account of their silence and respectability; but if indifference to the pictures is conclusive evidence then it must be admitted that such is the case.

One of the sweet young things gets chilly toes, fearing that her special little flirtation will be noted, and she hurriedly calls the attention of her swain, who has more of the marks of the college than of the studio, to a row of trees bordering a canal in a misty, green queue. "Aren't those poplars the cutest things?"

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"One of Albert Groll's. Remington said of him that he was the only man who could paint the desert. That gray white thing of Martin Rico's makes a fine contrast, and here, this of Israel's. If I were to pick out a painter to-day whom I consider the greatest favorite, all around favorite in America, I should say Israel without hesitation. This is only an woman sitting down and a child reading at her knee—only, but did you ever see a more exquisite atmosphere?"

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"The charm of the child's picture," says one, "is that she looks as if she were caught absolutely off guard. A picture picture should never have the same look."

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"You really see that hand now in real life," the girl answers. "I know a woman who has it, and she is medieval too in temperament. She's soft and sweet and subtle, and she wouldn't hesitate at anything to attain her object. Perhaps they painted those hands not through lack of education in anatomy but because of education in psychology."

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